

Ultra-Thin Wafer Handling System

Field of the Invention

The invention relates generally to the field of substrates for integrated circuits, and more particularly to methods and systems for holding, handling, and transporting ultra-thin
5 wafers.

Background of the Invention

As portable electronic devices, micro-electromechanical systems (MEMS), and smart cards become smaller and thinner, so too must the integrated circuits from which they are fabricated. Thin circuits not only consume less space, they also allow for more functionality
10 per unit volume, increase power dissipation, and provide for a mechanically flexible device that may conform to curved surfaces. Thin circuits are typically fabricated on ultra-thin substrates, such as ultra-thin silicon wafers. Typical dimensions of ultra-thin wafers are about 60 μm to 80 μm , while the theoretical limit for suitable thin wafers is about 10 μm .

Bernoulli end effectors have been used in various applications to handle thin
15 substrates. Bernoulli end effectors use a support member with fluid exhaust ports brought into close proximity with the top side of a substrate. The exhaust ports are configured so that the gas flow creates a low pressure region on the top side of the substrate causing it to lift up toward the support member. The substrate can be lifted from a substantially flat surface and transported from the top side of the substrate without contacting the top side. Contacting a
20 semiconductor wafer during processing typically contaminates it, thus decreasing the yield from individual semiconductor wafers.

A disadvantage of many prior art Bernoulli end effectors is that they do not provide guides to position the substrate, and thus do not provide for high precision centering of the substrate. Another disadvantage is that the holding mechanism restricts the transport motion
25 to paths within a horizontal plane or perpendicular to a horizontal plane.

Disadvantages of thin substrates include processing difficulties, such as cracking, bowing, or flexing during lifting, holding, handling, and transporting the substrates. Bernoulli end effectors can transfer thin substrates, but many substrate cassettes and assembly area tools cannot accommodate them. Further, a method for processing both sides
30 of a substrate is desirable, but supinating or flipping a substrate is difficult.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention features, at least in part an improved Bernoulli end effector for holding, handling, and transporting thin substrates. The end effector includes edge guides to aid in the positioning of the substrate and also includes friction pads that impede rotational and translational motion of the substrate lifted by the end effector. The friction pads may contact, for example, the outer 2 mm of the edge of the substrate. The friction pads permit the Bernoulli end effector to be translated and/or elevated at a greater rate of speed, while reducing the likelihood that holding, centering or anti-rotation forces will be compromised.

The present invention also provides an apparatus and method for supinating a substrate so that both surfaces of the substrate may be processed. The apparatus may include a Bernoulli end effector to deliver a substrate to a system of chucks, which may be rotatably mounted. The apparatus also may include a sensor to monitor the position of the substrate prior to being transferred.

The present invention also provides a substrate handling structure that prevents a thin substrate from bowing or flexing during processing, and also provides guides that prevent the thin substrate from moving or translating on the surface of the substrate handling structure. The guides prevent the substrate from moving, which improves the accuracy of the positioning of the substrate. This is particularly important if/when the substrate bows or flexes due to its thinness and/or stresses placed on the substrate.

Accordingly, in a first aspect, the invention provides a Bernoulli end effector including a support member defining at least one passage for directing a fluid at a substrate to apply a holding force and a drag force on the substrate; at least one edge guide in mechanical communication with the support member for contacting an edge of the substrate to oppose the drag force applied by the fluid; and at least one friction pad in mechanical communication with the support member for contacting a surface of the substrate to impede a rotational motion of the substrate. At least one friction pad may be attached to at least one edge guide. The end effector may include a first plurality of passages symmetrically arranged about an axis of the support member and a second plurality of passages asymmetrically arranged about the axis of the support member. The first plurality of passages may be arranged in a circular pattern for providing a Bernoulli force perpendicular

to a surface of the substrate. The second plurality of passages may be arranged in an arc for providing the drag force on the substrate.

The Bernoulli end effector can include an angle between a direction defined by the passages and a surface of the support member. The angle may be between about twenty and thirty degrees. The friction pads can be disposed for contacting the substrate within 2 mm of an edge of the substrate. The friction pad may be an elastomer or alumina. The edge guides can be beveled. The holding force can be applied first and then the drag force may be applied after a delay (e.g., between about 100 ms and 250 ms).

In another aspect, the invention features a method for handling a substrate with a Bernoulli end effector. The method includes directing a fluid at the substrate to apply a holding force and a drag force to the substrate; applying a counter force to an edge of the substrate to oppose the drag force; and applying a frictional force to a surface of the substrate adjacent to the edge of the substrate to impede a rotational motion of the substrate. The holding force creates a low pressure Bernoulli force to lift the substrate. In one embodiment, the holding force is first applied and then the drag force is applied after a delay.

In still another aspect, the invention provides a method for handling a substrate with a Bernoulli end effector. The method includes directing a fluid at the substrate to apply a holding force to the substrate; applying a drag force after applying the holding force; and applying a counter force to an edge of the substrate to oppose the drag force. The method can include applying a frictional force to a surface of the substrate adjacent to the edge of the substrate to impede a rotational motion of the substrate.

In yet another aspect, the invention provides a substrate handling structure including a substrate carrier having a substrate support feature; a substrate clamp moveable between a lowered position for securing a substrate on the substrate support feature and a raised position to permit placing the substrate on the substrate support feature; and at least one guide disposed adjacent to the substrate support feature for impeding a lateral movement of the substrate when the substrate clamp is in the raised position. The at least one guide can be retractably mounted for retracting the at least one guide when the substrate clamp secures the substrate. The substrate clamp can be configured to cause the at least one guide to retract when the substrate clamp is moved from the raised position to the lowered position.

In one embodiment of the substrate handling structure, the substrate clamp is configured to cover only a surface portion adjacent to an edge of the substrate. The substrate clamp can include a beveled edge portion configured to contact the substrate and center the substrate on the substrate support feature. The guide can include a spring that urges the guide to project above a surface of the substrate carrier. The guide may be attached to the substrate carrier. The substrate carrier can define at least one cavity within which the at least one guide is moveably mounted. The guide can include a first portion and a second portion that is flexibly attached to the first portion, the second portion for contacting the substrate.

In still another aspect, the invention provides an apparatus for supinating a substrate.

The apparatus includes a first substrate chuck for securing the substrate while a first surface of the substrate is exposed; a second substrate chuck spaced in opposition to the first substrate chuck for securing the substrate after receiving the substrate from the first substrate chuck to expose a second surface of the substrate; and an end effector for either delivering the substrate to the first substrate chuck or receiving the substrate from the second substrate chuck. In one embodiment, the end effector is rotatably mounted for rotating the substrate about an axis parallel to a face of the substrate or for rotating after delivering a substrate to the first or second substrate chuck. In another embodiment, the first chuck and the second chuck are each fixedly mounted. In various embodiments, the first chuck and the second chuck are mounted in a fixed relationship to each other, and together are rotatably mounted for rotating a substrate secured by one of the first and second chucks. At least one of the first and second chucks may be either a Bernoulli chuck or an electrostatic chuck. In various embodiments of the apparatus, the end effector is a Bernoulli end effector. The apparatus can include an actuator in mechanical communication with the first substrate chuck. The actuator controls the spacing between the first substrate chuck and the second substrate chuck. The apparatus also can include a sensor (e.g., a camera) for monitoring the position of the substrate. The sensor may be integrated with at least one of the chucks.

In another aspect, the invention provides a method for supinating a substrate. The method includes securing a substrate with a first substrate chuck such that a first surface of the substrate faces the first substrate chuck; transferring the substrate to a second substrate chuck that is spaced in opposition to the first substrate chuck such that a second surface of the substrate faces the second substrate chuck; and receiving the substrate from the second

substrate chuck to expose the second surface of the substrate. The method can include transferring, by an end effector, the substrate to the first substrate chuck. The method also may include rotating a portion of the end effector after transferring the substrate to the first substrate chuck and before receiving the substrate by the end effector. In one embodiment, the method includes translating at least one of the first substrate chuck and the second substrate chuck to control the spacing between the chucks prior to transferring the substrate.

Other aspects and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following drawings, detailed description, and claims, all of which illustrate the principles of the invention, by way of example only.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The advantages of the invention described above, together with further advantages, may be better understood by referring to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. In the drawings, like reference characters generally refer to the same parts throughout the different views. The drawings are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead generally being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention.

Figure 1 is a top view of an embodiment of a substrate handling system;

Figure 2A is a bottom view of an embodiment of a Bernoulli end effector according to the invention;

Figure 2B is a cross-sectional view of the Bernoulli end effector shown in Figure 2B;

Figure 3 is a sectional elevation of an exemplary Bernoulli end effector according to the invention;

Figure 4 is a perspective view of an embodiment of a system for supinating a substrate, according to the invention;

Figure 5 is a top view of an embodiment of a Bernoulli chuck for use with the system depicted in Figure 4;

Figure 6 is a cross-sectional view of an exemplary substrate handling structure according to the invention;

Figure 7A is a perspective view of an embodiment of a guide for a substrate, according to the invention; and

Figure 7B is a cross-sectional view of the guide of Figure 7A disposed in an exemplary substrate handling structure.

Detailed Description of the Invention

Figure 1 is a top view of an embodiment of a substrate handling system 10 that may benefit from features of the invention. Such a system 10 may be a component piece or tool of an in-line processing apparatus, e.g., described in U.S. Patent No. 6,217,272 to Felsenthal *et al.* and U.S. Patent No. 6,530,733 to Klein *et al.*, the entire disclosures of which are hereby incorporated by reference. The system 10 includes a robot arm 12 that transports a substrate 14 or a batch of substrates 14 from a substrate carrier 16 and places them on a substrate handling structure 18 (e.g., a wafer tray or any type of substrate carrier known in the art). The substrates 14 may be, e.g., semiconductor wafers or glass substrates. The diameter of the substrates 14 may be, e.g., about 125 mm, about 150 mm, about 200 mm, about 250 mm, or about 300 mm. The thickness of the substrates 14 may be between about 10 μ m and about 750 μ m. Typical dimensions of an ultra-thin wafer are a diameter of about 150 mm and a thickness of about 80 μ m, although, as will be described below, the features of the invention become more helpful as the diameter of the wafer becomes larger, and the thickness of the wafer becomes smaller.

The robot arm 12 may be any type known in the art, and is typically computer controlled. In one embodiment, the robot arm 12 is a rotatable multi-segmented arm that is positionable between a first position proximate to the substrate carrier 16 (as shown in dotted view) and a second position that is proximate to the substrate handling structure 18. The robot arm 12 is movable vertically to enable it to load and unload substrates from different vertical levels of the substrate carrier 16. The substrate handling structure 18 may be located in a load lock chamber, which transfers the substrates 14 from atmosphere to vacuum for processing.

Typically, the robot arm 12 includes an end effector 20a for lifting the substrates 14 from the substrate carrier 16 and transferring them to the substrate handling structure 18. In one embodiment, the end effector is a Bernoulli end effector. In another embodiment, the end effector is an electrostatic chuck, although vacuum end effectors and edge clamp end effectors may be used.

Figure 2A depicts the bottom surface of an illustrative embodiment of a Bernoulli end effector 20b that may be used in the system 10. Figure 2B shows a cross-sectional view of the Bernoulli end effector 20' of Figure 2B. The Bernoulli end effector 20b includes a

support member **22**, a series of passages **24**, an arm **26**, at least one edge guide **28**, and at least one friction pad **30**.

Bernoulli end effectors are particularly useful for ultra-thin wafers because they not only lift the wafers, but they also hold the wafers flat. The Bernoulli end effectors are also advantageous because they can lift a wafer that has bowed or flexed while preventing the wafer from contacting the end effector. Larger diameter wafers and thinner wafers have a greater tendency to bow. For example, an ultra-thin wafer resting on a flat surface may bow or flex as much as 1 cm. By adjusting the distance between the wafer and the end effector prior to lifting or by adjusting the fluid flow rate, one can compensate for the bow or flex of the ultra-thin wafers. Features of the invention, such as the edge guides and friction pads, can be included on the Bernoulli end effector to improve positioning and centering of the wafers on the end effector and impede motion of the substrate while the end effector is being translated or rotated.

According to the illustrative embodiment, the support member **22** is fixedly attached to the arm **26**. The arm **26** may be the robotic arm **12** shown in Figure **1**, or may be connectable to the robotic arm **12**. In one embodiment, the support member **22** and the arm **26** are metal, although they need not be the same material. Suitable metals include, but are not limited to, aluminum, stainless steel, and titanium. The support member **22** and the arm **26** may also be a composite material or a metal alloy. According to the embodiment depicted in Figure **2B**, the support member **22** protrudes below the bottom surface of the arm **26**. In an alternative embodiment, the support member **22** and the arm **26** are flush on the bottom surface. In yet another embodiment, the arm **26** protrudes below the support member **22**.

According to the illustrative embodiment, the support member **22** has a series of passages **24** bored into it. The passages **24** direct a fluid at a substrate, e.g., an ultra-thin wafer (not shown), to apply a holding force and/or a drag force to the surface of the wafer. The drag force is a lateral force applied to the substrate **14** to push the wafer against the edge guides **28**. The passages **24** may be bored by a drill, by Electrical Discharge Machining (EDM), or by laser drilling. The fluid can be a liquid or a gas. Suitable gases include, but are not limited to, dry nitrogen, air, argon, or helium. Typical flow rates can range from about five standard liters per minute (SLM) to about 20 SLM (the greater the flow rate, the greater the holding force applied to the wafer).

According to the illustrative embodiment, the cross-section of the passages **24** is circular. The cross-section also may be square, rectangular, elliptical, or oblong. The distance between the support member and the ultra-thin wafer prior to applying the holding force is typically about 2 mm to about 12 mm. In one embodiment, the distance is about 2
5 mm to about 3 mm, which prevents the wafer from being lifted too abruptly and crashing into the bottom surface of the support member **22** or the arm **26**.

In one embodiment, the passages **24** are bored into the support member **22** at an angle relative to the surface of the support member. A typical angle is about 30°, although the angle may be between about 10° and about 40°. A shallow angle is preferred so that the fluid
10 contacts the substrate at a glancing angle. This allows for the ultra-thin wafer to be in closer proximity to the bottom surface of the support member **22** and provides a greater holding force to the wafer. Shallow angles increase the amount of material that must be drilled to form the passage **24**, and thus increases the cost of machining.

In one embodiment, the passages **24** can be between about 0.010 inch and 0.020 inch
15 in diameter, and preferably between about 0.010 in and about 0.012 inch, although smaller diameter passages can be drilled. Like the angle of the passages, the smaller bores require a greater cost. In one embodiment, the angle would be as shallow as, the diameter would be as small as, and the spacing would be as close as the material and fabrication methods permit. This provides for the most efficient hold force, and minimize the probability of damaging the
20 ultra-thin wafer.

The passages **24** can be arranged symmetrically around the central axis of the support member **22** or can be arranged asymmetrically. For example, as shown in Figure **2A**, a first series of passages is arranged around the central axis in a circular pattern **32**. This pattern **32** delivers the hold force to the substrate, while a second series of passages arranged in an arc
25 pattern **34** delivers the drag force. The fluid source for the circular pattern **32** and the arc pattern **34** may be separate, or may be the same. In an exemplary embodiment, forty passages are distributed around the circular pattern **32** with about a 9° spacing, and thirteen holes are distributed around the arc pattern **34** with about a 10° spacing.

In an alternative embodiment, a single series of passages **24** is arranged around the
30 central axis in a circular pattern. The distribution of passages **24** is varied around the single

circle such that the density of passages is greater in the region applying the drag force. In this embodiment, the passages 24 are fed by the same fluid source.

The edge guides 28 contact an edge of the ultra-thin wafer and oppose the drag force applied by the fluid. In various embodiments, the edge guides 28 are in mechanical communication with either the support member 22 or the arm 26. In an alternative embodiment, the edge guides 28 are distributed between the support member 22 and the arm 26. According to the illustrative embodiment, the edge guides 28 protrude below the bottom surface of the support member 22. In one embodiment, the edge guides 28 protrude about 1 mm below the surface of the support member 22. In another embodiment, the edge guides 28 protrude about 2 mm below the surface of the support member 22. In various embodiments, the edge guides 28 are ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene (UHMWPE). The edge guides 28 may contact the wafer with a flat edge or a curved edge. The width or diameter of the edge guides 28 may be between about 1 mm and about 6 mm. Preferably, the edge guides are cylindrical with a diameter of between about 3 mm and about 5 mm. In one embodiment, the edge guides 28 are beveled. If the wafer is slightly off-center, the beveled edge gently urges the wafer back on center. In one embodiment, there are between about two and about twenty edge guides, although more edge guides may be used. In one embodiment, fourteen edge guides are used.

According to the illustrative embodiment, the support member 22 includes friction pads 30 for contacting a surface of an ultra-thin wafer and/or impeding motion of the wafer. For example, when the end effector is translated horizontally, the friction pads 30 inhibit the wafer from sliding out of position. The friction pads 30 can reduce or preclude rotational motion of the wafer. The friction pads 30 can be attached to a edge guide 28. Alternatively, the friction pads 30 may be positioned between adjacent edge guides 28.

In one embodiment, the friction pads 30 contact the substrate within a 2 mm wide edge exclusion zone. Contact in this zone is permitted during processing because wafer devices are not typically placed in this region, and thus the wafer is not contaminated. The friction pads 30 may be formed from alumina or an elastomer, such as VITON® fluoroelastomer and KALREZ® perfluoroelastomer (available from DuPont Dow Elastomer, LLC). The friction pads 30 may be circular, square, rectangular, or oblong. In various embodiments, the friction pads are between about 1 mm² and about 2 mm². In one

embodiment, the friction pads are about 1 x 1.75 mm. In another embodiment, the friction pads are about 1 x 1 mm.

In various embodiments, the Bernoulli end effector **20b** includes a sensor, e.g., a camera or other sensor known in the art. The sensor monitors the performance
5 characteristics of the end effector, including, but not limited to, fluid pressure and fluid flow rate. The sensor may also monitor the substrate characteristics, such as position, orientation, or simply just the presence of a substrate. The sensor may be in mechanical communication with or close proximity to the Bernoulli end effector **20b**.

In one embodiment of the Bernoulli end effector **20b**, the hold force and the drag
10 force are applied simultaneously to the ultra-thin wafer to lift the wafer and urge an edge of the wafer into contact with the edge guides **28**. In an alternative embodiment, where the fluid source for the patterns of passages **32** and **34** are separate, the hold force and the drag force can be applied separately. When working with ultra-thin wafers, if the hold force and the drag force are applied simultaneously, the possibility exists that the wafer can be pulled
15 toward the edge guides before the hold force has provided adequate lift. This may result in the ultra-thin wafer being lifted up into the bottom surface of a edge guide, and possibly damaging the wafer. To prevent this, the hold force can be applied first, and then the drag force is applied after a short delay. Typical delays are between about 100 ms to about 250 ms.

20 Figure 3 depicts a section of an exemplary Bernoulli end effector **20c** formed from component pieces. The end effector **20c** includes a cap ring **36**, a nozzle ring **38**, and an arm **40**. The component pieces may be epoxied at points of intersection **42** to prevent fluid from escaping the end effector **20c**. The cap ring **36** may include a cavity **44** to decrease its weight. The nozzle ring **38** includes a plurality of passages **24'** that deliver fluid to the
25 surface of a substrate (not shown). A cavity **46** is defined by the cap ring **36** and the nozzle ring **38**, and the plurality of passages **24'** are connected to the cavity **46**, which assists in the delivery of the fluid to the passages **24'**. The nozzle ring **38** also includes a fluid passage **48** to connect the cavity **46** to a fluid channel **50** in the arm **40**. The fluid passage **48** can be, for example, about 0.047 inch diameter. The fluid channel **50** directs fluid from a fluid source
30 (not shown) to the passages **24'**. In one embodiment, the fluid channel **50** is formed by

milling a trough in the arm **40**, and then affixing a thin piece of metal, e.g., a 0.01 inch stainless steel ribbon, along the length of the fluid channel **50** to seal it.

Figure **4** depicts an illustrative embodiment of an apparatus **52** for supinating a substrate **14** having a first surface **54** and a second surface **56**. The apparatus **52** includes an end effector **20d**, and a first substrate chuck **58** and a second substrate chuck **60** attached to a mount **62**. During semiconductor wafer processing, an ultra-thin wafer may be supinated so that both sides of the wafer can be processed. For example, flipping the wafer permits further processing of the underside, such as metallization.

To supinate an ultra-thin wafer, the two opposing chucks **58** and **60** are aligned, as described in more detail below. The end effector **20d** has the ability to translate in the horizontal plane or rotate about its longitudinal axis. The end effector **20d** may deliver the substrate **14** to the first chuck **58**, and then rotate 180° about its longitudinal axis to receive the substrate from the second substrate chuck **60**. Alternatively, the mount **62** may have the ability to rotate about an axis parallel to the plane of the substrate chucks **58** and **60**. The end effector **20d** then receives the substrate **14** from the second substrate chuck **60** after the substrate **14** is transferred between chucks.

According to the illustrative embodiment, the end effector **20d** delivers to the first substrate chuck **58** the substrate **14** with the first surface **54** exposed. The second substrate chuck **60** is spaced in opposition to the first substrate chuck **58**, and provides sufficient space for the end effector **20d** to place the substrate **14** without contacting either chuck **58** or **60**. Either the first chuck **58** or the second chuck **60** may be mounted on an actuator, so that the distance between the chucks **58** and **60** can be controlled prior to transferring the substrate **14**. The distance between the chucks **58** and **60** may be between about 1 mm and about 12 mm during transfer, although a smaller distance (about 1 mm to about 2 mm) is preferred so that an ultra-thin wafer is not damaged.

Transfer of the substrate **14** is accomplished by substantially simultaneously turning off the first substrate chuck **58** and turning on the second substrate chuck **60**. The second substrate chuck **60** receives the substrate **14** from the first substrate chuck **58**, thereby exposing the second surface **56** of the substrate **14**. The end effector **20d** is then positioned to receive the substrate **14** from the second substrate chuck **60** after the substrate **14** is flipped.

In one embodiment, the apparatus **52** includes a sensor and/or electronics to determine the position or orientation of the substrate **14** prior to, during, and/or after supination. If the sensor determines that the substrate **14** is not positioned correctly, it may rotate either the first chuck **58** or the second chuck **60**, so that the position will be corrected.

5 The sensor may be a camera or other sensor known in the art. The sensor may be attached to either the first chuck **58** or the second chuck **60**.

In one embodiment, the end effector **20d** may be attached to a robotic arm that supinates the end effector **20d** prior to receiving the substrate **14** from the second substrate chuck **60**. After receiving the substrate **14**, the end effector **20d** may be inverted a second
10 time so that the second surface **56** of the substrate **14** faces downward. In an alternative embodiment, the mount **62** is rotatable, so that the substrate **14** may be supinated while being lifted by one of the two substrate chucks **58** and **60**.

Either of the two substrate chucks **58** and **60** may be either a Bernoulli chuck or an electrostatic chuck. The end effector **20d** may be a Bernoulli end effector, such as the
15 Bernoulli end effectors **20b** or **20c** described above. As described above, Bernoulli end effectors and chucks are particularly advantageous for ultra-thin semiconductor wafers because they provide a contact free lifting device and because they hold the wafers flat.

Figure **5** depicts an illustrative embodiment of a Bernoulli chuck **58'** for use with the apparatus **52** depicted in Figure **4**. The chuck **58'** includes a support member **22'**, a series of
20 passages **24''** for delivering a fluid to a substrate, friction pads **30'**, and cut-outs **64** in the support member **22'**. In this embodiment, the passages are located closer to the perimeter of the support member **22'** than, for example, in the Bernoulli end effectors described above. Having the passages closer to the edge of the Bernoulli chuck **58'** provides a holding force closer to the edge of the wafer, which reduces the possibility of distortion of an ultra-thin
25 wafer and, in particular, larger diameter wafers. In the illustrative embodiment, the friction pads **30'** are positioned around the entire perimeter of the support member **22'** to provide additional resistance to rotational or translational motion of the wafer when it is supinated. The cut-outs **64** reduce the weight of the support member **22'**.

Figure **6** shows a cross-sectional view of an exemplary substrate handling structure
30 **18'** according to the invention. The structure **18'** includes a substrate carrier **66**, a substrate support feature **68**, a substrate clamp, at least one guide **70**, and a secondary base **74**. The

substrate 14 is placed on the substrate support feature 68 of the substrate carrier 66. The substrate clamp 70 holds the substrate 14 flat during processing of the substrate 14. After processing, the substrate 14, and particularly ultra-thin wafers, are more susceptible to curling, bowing or flexing due to stress applied, e.g., by a film deposited. The substrate clamp 70 also maintains the shape of the substrate 14 until an end effector can remove the substrate from the substrate carrier 66. The substrate clamp 70 is moveable between a lowered position for securing the substrate 14 and a raised position, which permits the substrate 14 to be placed or retrieved, e.g., by one of the end effectors 20a, 20b, 20c, or 20d.

Because the substrates are so thin, they may be analogized to a piece of paper resting on a table. The slightest displacement of air may cause the substrate to move. The guides 72 impede lateral movement of the substrate 14 when the substrate clamp 70 is in the raised position. When the substrate clamp 70 is lowered, the guides 72 may retract below the surface of the substrate carrier 66. The guides 72 may be attached to the substrate carrier 66 or to the secondary base 74. The guides 72 also may serve as pins that raise or lower the substrate clamp when the guides 72 are actuated. In an alternative embodiment, the guides 72 may be spring loaded, so that they pop-up when the substrate clamp 70 is raised. In this embodiment, the guide may be located in a recess or cavity in the substrate carrier.

In one embodiment, the substrate clamp 70 is constructed to only cover the edge of the substrate 14. The substrate clamp 70 may have a beveled edge. The substrate clamp 70 may contact the edge of the wafer as the substrate clamp 70 is lowered. If the ultra-thin wafer is not centered on the substrate support feature 68, the beveled edge will gently nudge the wafer toward the center of the support feature 68 as the substrate clamp 70 is lowered.

In addition, the substrate clamp 70 may be constructed in sections. For example, if multiple sections are used, then one section may be raised to expose between about 25% and about 40% of the edge of an ultra-thin wafer. The wafer remains flat until the Bernoulli end effector can be introduced to lift the wafer from the carrier.

Figure 7A shows an exemplary guide 72' for impeding lateral movement of a substrate (not shown). The guide 72' includes a rigid portion 76, a flexible portion 78, and a ridge 80. The rigid portion 76 forms the body of the guide 72'. The flexible portion 78 contacts the edge of the substrate. It provides a pliant surface that minimizes the stress applied to the edge of an ultra-thin wafer. The ridge 80 is disposed to contact the substrate

clamp (not shown), thereby preventing the substrate clamp from contacting the more fragile flexible portion 78. In one embodiment, the rigid portion 76 and the flexible portion 78 are metal, although they need not be the same material. Suitable metals include, but are not limited to, aluminum, stainless steel, and titanium. The portions 76 and 78 also may be a
5 composite material or a metal alloy.

Figure 7B depicts a cross-sectional view of the guide 72' placed in a recess 82 formed in the substrate carrier 66' of an exemplary substrate handling structure 18". As described above, the structure 18" includes a substrate clamp 70' for holding the substrate 14 flat before, during, and after processing. The substrate clamp 70', when lowered, forces the
10 guide 72' into the recess 82. When the substrate clamp 70' is raised, a spring 84 forces the guide 72' up, and the flexible portion of the guide 72' contacts the substrate 14.

While the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to specific illustrative embodiments, it should be understood that various changes in form and detail may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by
15 the appended claims.